2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

transport; there is no flat desert, as at Sharjah, suitable for an air-field, and the mountain ranges are too close for safe flying.

In parenthesis, I learnt that shortly after the Sheikh of Sharjah had agreed to lease his land to the British for the purpose of an airfield, he was secretly murdered by a hired assassin, who crept into his palace while he slept, put his eyes out with a red-hot iron, and slit his throat. The present ruler of Sharjah, Sultan bin Saqr, never sleeps without an armed bodyguard outside his room, and it is whispered that he is waiting to avenge the murder of his father. He has little doubt who instigated the crime.

An old retainer of the Khan Sahib's, a wrinkled Arab with a henna-dyed beard, Ali bin Achmed, came to talk to us. He is employed as a seaman and looks after the petrol dhow on which the emergency stocks provided by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company are stored. He is a distinguished-looking old man, with a fund of stories which he related to us as the sun sank slowly behind the sandhills and the palm trees leant in ragged silhouette against the sapphire-tinted horizon.

The Khan Sahib closed the shutters, lighted a perfumed coil of anti-mosquito powder, and hung a kerosene lamp from a hook in the ceiling. A slave brought us dishes of rice, steamed lamb, curry balls, chipatties, *haloua*, fruit and turkish delight, and, feeling ravenous, we ate in silence, seated on Persian rugs with our legs tucked underneath us in Arab style.

After the third cup of clove-scented coffee, we sat in the dim light, smoking cigarettes, while Ali bin Achmed puffed away at his tiny pipeful of hashish. He told us wild stories of shipwrecks on the rocks, and of pirates who plundered the unfortunate vessels and held the passengers to ransom; of British gunboats which shelled the village in reprisal and clapped the headmen in gaol. Then he spoke of the wild men of the mountains, the Shi'hou tribe, who seldom left their dark caves in the hills, and who lived on fish, wild honey and dates. They never mixed with the lowland Arabs, were greatly feared on account of their wild appearance and cruel habits, and were believed to be in league with a djinn.

'There is gold and tin in the mountains,' said Ali, 'but men will not seek for it on account of these wild ones. A man would be rich who dared to climb those cruel slopes and search for the gleaming metal. But, praise be to Allah, it would be a foolhardy enterprise.'

The Shi'hou tribe is a very ancient one, according to Ali, and

ment of 'the hooks'. A thief condemned to this terrible sentence may well blench. He is dropped from a high wall or tower on to sharp hooks which project from the wall. With his limbs securely skewered, he is left hanging in the pitiless sun until the vultures end his misery, leaving a whitened skeleton as a warning to wantons. Influential prisoners are cast into the palace dungeons without light or food, and garrotted quietly in the night by their gaolers. Branding and flogging are also common forms of punishment in Arabia.

A fair amount of desert raiding is still carried on in the Jebel Shamailiyah district, the range of mountains between Oman and Muscat, and at Sinash, a lonely town in the hills, the *Wali*, or Sultan's Viceroy, has been obliged to use draconian means of dealing with brigands, who sometimes resort to ransom and are a menace to peaceful merchants who use the pass. Not long ago one of the Sultan's brothers was abducted and carried off into the hills. The ransom demanded—a heavy one—was paid, but a year later the ringleader and several of his men were caught by the Sultan's trackers. They suffered some unpleasant tortures before they were finally put out of their sufferings by being hanged. Their property was confiscated and their unfortunate relatives were obliged to pay several time the amount of the ransom. Crime does not pay in Arabia, unless you are on the winning side. Yet the bandit and the camel raider persist in their vocations in spite of all discouragement. The Arab is prepared to fight—to the death, if necessary, for that which he steals, and this is a spirit which all Arabs admire.

Young Arab boys and girls, as well as slaves and Persian servants, are sometimes carried off by the raiders, and at one time I was obliged to provide an armed guard for the Fort bearers, as they were terrified to return to Sharjah at night, a distance of one mile, unless accompanied. Haider, my personal bearer, a youth of fifteen, told me that he had once been attacked at night, and for a time I allowed him to sleep in one of the mess rooms. High prices are fetched in the slave market for young people, who are sold to merchants or pearling fleet owners and treated little better than negro slaves. A fifteen years old Persian boy may fetch as much as 2,000 rupees, and a girl about 1,500. Negroes fetch only half this amount. The British authorities are aware that a traffic in slaves is carried on in Oman, but claim that they have been unable to obtain any evidence of it. Since I have met slaves who complained to me that they had been abducted and sold in the market, and once